

**TEACHING WITH FILM:  
A GUIDE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS**

**WILLIAM B. RUSSELL III**

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By  
William Benedict Russell III

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**This guide provides pre-service and in-service social studies teachers with information regarding teaching with film.**

It has been found to be an effective educational tool! Using film for instructional purposes is a common practice in many classrooms. However, many teachers are unaware of the benefits of using film for instructional purposes, as well as effective methods for effectively integrating film into social studies instruction. The purpose of this resource guide is to provide, both pre-service and in-service teachers, with a rationale of teaching with film and information on effectively integrating film into the social studies curriculum.

### **Benefits**

Teaching with film has been found to have a large number of positive benefits. Teaching with film can 1) aid retention of content knowledge, 2) arouses interest in historical figures, events, and topics, 3) stimulate a viewer's imagination, 4) correct,

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clarifies, and/or simplify previous content knowledge, 5) encourages critical thinking and related skills, 6) promote visual literacy, and 7) promote active viewing.

### **Legality**

Can I legally show a movie in my classroom? Yes, but there are restrictions. For example, your school/district policies regarding film use could restrict film use. I recommend you contact your school/district to obtain the written policy regarding film use. Another issue is permission. Obtain written permission from your administrator and each child's parent or guardian allowing you to show a specific movie in class.

Can I use copyright movies? Yes, but you must adhere to the United States Copyright Code. The use of copyrighted films in a classroom is legal. Section 110 (1) of Title 17<sup>i</sup> of the United States Code on Copyright and Conditions cites the following exemption for the use of copyrighted films for educational purposes:

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“Performance or display of a work by instructors or pupils in the course of face-to-face teaching activities of a nonprofit educational institution, in a classroom or similar place devoted to instruction, unless in the case of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, the performance, or the display of individual images, is given by means of a copy that was not lawfully made under this title, and that the person responsible for the performance knew or had reason to believe was not lawfully made.”

Teachers must adhere to the following guidelines when using films:

- Films must be shown in a non-profit educational institution. Within the institution, the film must be

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shown in a classroom or place intended for instruction.

- Films must be for planned educational purposes, not for extra-curricular entertainment.
- Films must be shown by the teacher to the students in a “face-to-face” encounter.

### **Teaching with Film**

Film is an effective and powerful tool for help teaching social studies. For film to be effective it must be used appropriately. To ensure appropriate film use, following steps:

#### **Step 1: Preparation**

The preparation step includes creating lesson plans that incorporate film, while still meeting instructional goals/objectives, state standards, national standards, and adhering to all legal requirements.

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**Step 2: Pre-viewing**

The pre-viewing step is done prior to students viewing the film. The pre-viewing step should include an introduction of the film and the purpose for viewing the film.

**Step 3: Watching the Film**

Watching the film step is where students actually view the film. The watching the film step includes watching the film (entirety or clips) and ensuring that students are aware of what they should be doing and looking for while watching the film.

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#### **Step 4: Assessment**

The assessment step is done after students have watched the film. The assessment step includes assessing student learning in some fashion.

#### **Methods for Teaching with Film**

There are number of ways film can be used in the classroom. The following methodologies have been classroom tested and found to be effective.

##### **Film as a Visual Textbook**

Using film as a visual textbook is the most common method used by teachers. Teachers often will use a film as visual record to convey “what happened.” Examples of possible films: *Gandhi* (1982), *Schindler’s List* (1993), *Glory* (1989).

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Film as a Depicter of Atmosphere

Using film to depict a time period. Allows teachers to display architecture, living conditions, clothes, weapons, etc... Conveying the atmosphere to the students only requires short film clips, which saves instructional time. Examples of possible films: *Gettysburg* (1993), *Gladiator* (2000).

Film as an Analogy

Using film as an analogy includes using films that are similar to events, people, places, etc... but otherwise different. There are many films that can be utilized as an analogy for various issues, events, and/or people. Examples of possible films: *X-men* (2000), *The Wave* (1981), *Red Dawn* (1984).

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Film as a Historiography:

Artifacts (like films) created during a time period can be a valuable resource. Many older films, as well as contemporary films, portray the relevant issues of society. The film is used to demonstrate important societal issues and topics relevant to the time period.

Example of possible films: *12 Angry Men* (1955), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *Casablanca* (1942)

Film as a Springboard

This often is done with short film clips to provoke interest and discussion , but entire movies can be used. The film is used as a motivator to jump start or springboard into the material. Examples of possible films: *John Q* (2002), *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), *Life of David Gale* (2003).

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**Thing to Remember!**

- Use a film for educational purposes, not as a reward or time filler.
- Obtain permission from parents and administrators
- Adhere to United States Code on Copyright.
- View the film prior to using it in class.
- A film (alone) is not the lesson, but part of a lesson.
- Good planning is important.
- Remember your audience. Is the film appropriate?

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<sup>i</sup> United States Copyright Office. (1976). *Title 17 (1) Section 107 of the Copyright Law of the United States; Limitations on exclusive rights: Fair use.* Retrieved from the World Wide Web: Fair Use. <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#107>. United States Copyright Office. (1976). *Title 17 (1) Section 110 of the Copyright Law of the United States; Limitations on exclusive rights: Exemption of certain performances and displays.* Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#110>